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ABSTRACT

This report is one of a series from a project entitled "Case Studies in Evaluating the Benefits and Costs of Mediated Instruction and Distributed Learning," funded through a Field-Initiated Studies Educational Research Grant. The case study subject is the use of Daedalus courseware, an interactive program that allows all participants to read and comment upon the work of others, to teach basic English writing at Baruch College in the City University of New York system. In spring 1997, Daedalus was used for the first time in a course designed for students who fail to demonstrate minimal proficiency in reading and writing (75% of the 16 students in the Daedalus section passed the CUNY Writing Assessment Test, compared to 53% of the 15 students in the control section). The instructor's assessment of the exit exams indicated that the students in the Daedalus section wrote longer, higher quality essays. The report includes the following sections: (1) "Summary, Findings, and Conclusions"; (2) "Background and Context"; (3) "Benefits of Daedalus: Student Learning Outcomes, Student Persistence, and Institutional Renewal"; and (4) "Cost Estimates." Also included are a table of contents and "Appendix A: Abstract on Teaching Writing with Computers," using example of InterChange exercise. (DLS)

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ED 422 834

Teaching College Literacy: A Case Study in the Benefits and Costs of Daedalus Courseware at Baruch College

Baruch College

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Acknowledgments

This report is one of a series from a project entitled *Case Studies in Evaluating the Benefits and Costs of Mediated Instruction and Distributed Learning.* The project is funded through a Field-Initiated Studies Educational Research Grant by the National Institute on Postsecondary Education, Libraries, and Lifelong Learning, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education with additional funding provided by Information Resources and Technology in the Chancellor's Office of the California State University. The project is jointly sponsored by the California State University, the National Learning Infrastructure Initiative of EDUCOM, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

The project director gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of Michael Ribaudo, University Dean, City University of New York, and Colette Wagner, Director of Education, Training, and Staff Development, CUNY Office of Computing and Information Services, in identifying this case study and, in particular, the support and assistance of George Otte, the Director of Writing Programs at Baruch College and coordinator for the case study. George provided the data on student performance in Table 1 as well as comments on the interpretation of the exam scores and an abstract of an article describing how the courseware was used in an earlier basic English course. He and Steve Rappaport also provided valuable editorial comments on the entire study.

Support, assistance, and advice were also provided by members of the project's Steering, Review, and Oversight Committee: Tony Bates, Director of Distance Education and Technology, University of British Columbia; Dennis Jones, President of NCHEMS; Jim Mingle, Executive Director of SHEEO; and Tom West, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Information Resources and Technology, CSU Chancellor's Office.

Teaching College Literacy: A Case Study in the Benefits and Costs of Daedalus Courseware at Baruch College

Baruch College

Summary, Findings, and Conclusions

1. The subject of this case study is the use of Daedalus courseware to teach basic English writing at Baruch College in the City University of New York system.

2. Each term since 1990 at least one section of a basic English writing course has been taught using the Daedalus courseware, an interactive writing program that allows all participants to read and comment upon the work of others.

3. In spring term 1997, Daedalus was used for the first time in a course titled "College Literacy" (ENG 0160). The course differs from standard basic (or remedial) writing in that students placing in it fail to demonstrate minimal proficiency in reading as well as in writing (as determined by standard tests used throughout the City University of New York). Presumed to have more serious problems with literacy and language proficiency (because they fail the reading test as well as the writing test), the students are taught in sections that are smaller than the standard basic writing sections and meet for one additional hour each week.

Benefit Comparisons

4. *Learning Outcomes.* (a) Seventy-five percent of the 16 students in the Dadaelus section of ENG 0160 passed the CUNY Writing Assessment Test. This compares to a 53 percent pass rate for the 15 students in the control section (taught by an equally experienced and effective instructor). The difference in the passing rate was not statistically significant. (b) The instructor's assessment of the exit exams (each of which was graded by three independent readers) was that "the students in the computer-enhanced section consistently wrote longer ...essays rich in ideas and details, organizationally complex, remarkable in their fluency."

5. *Student Persistence.* Improved pass rates in ENG 0160 should have the potential to improve a student's persistence to re-enroll in subsequent terms and eventually to complete a degree. Data are not available at this time, however, to test this hypothesis.

6. *Institutional Renewal.* The computer courseware has not been generally adopted to teach the basic (remedial) English courses. The courseware, which now involves synchronous computer use in a classroom, represents the beginning of a transition that will evolve to courseware available on the Internet that will be accessible by students at any time from sites both on- and off-campus.

Cost Comparisons

7. The computer-enhanced and regular classroom versions of the course are taught with essentially the same enrollments and workload credit for the instructors. For purposes of this comparison it is also assumed the faculty salary costs for the computer and regular classroom sections are equal.

   The imputed costs of the courseware and the computer lab add approximately $540 to the cost of the computer section, i.e., the computer section is $540 more expensive than the regular classroom section. This represents a 7 percent increase in cost per student enrolled in the computer section compared to the classroom section.

8. Assuming the same model described above, and a pass rate of 50 percent for the regular version of the course and 75 percent for the computer version, the cost per passing student is approximately 29 percent less for the computer version of the course.

9. Students who fail the remedial course the first time must retake it before they can graduate. Students who repeat the course generate "second round" costs for the campus. Assuming that all failing students from both the computer and regular sections retake the course allows for a calculation of these second round costs which are then added to the original course costs. Because fewer students fail the computer course, the second round costs associated with the computer version are less. On this basis, and assuming the courseware does have the potential to increase course pass rates, the computer section shows a potential to reduce costs by 11 percent over what would have occurred with the regular version of the course.

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Background and Context

The City University of New York

The City University of New York (CUNY) is the largest urban university in the United States. Some 200,000 regular students are enrolled in degree programs on its 21 campuses located in the five boroughs of New York City. Another 150,000 individuals are enrolled in adult and continuing education courses. The CUNY traces its roots to the 1847 founding of the Free Academy, which later became the City College of New York. Then, as today, its mission was to "educate the whole people"—to uphold a commitment to academic excellence while providing equal access to and opportunity for education.

Baruch College[1]

Located in the Gramercy Park section of Manhattan and named in honor of the statesman and financier Bernard M. Baruch, Baruch College was established as a senior college in the City University of New York system in 1968. Baruch's primary mission is to educate students for effective leadership in a global, political, social, and economic community, principally through business and administrative programs that are integrated with a comprehensive liberal arts education.

The college is organized into three schools: (1) The School of Business is the largest collegiate business school in the United States. It is the only public college in New York City accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business. (2) The School of Public Affairs, established in 1994, offers both undergraduate and graduate programs. All graduate public affairs programs are accredited by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration. (3) The School of Liberal Arts and Sciences offers the BA in fifteen majors and provides a liberal arts education for all Baruch students.

The college's total enrollment—both undergraduate and graduate—is approximately 15,000, of which 12,500 are undergraduates. The college provides a full range of courses in the evening to accommodate students who work during the day. Baruch's students—from over 90 countries—reflect the ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of the city and the nation.

The Daedalus Courseware and English 0160, "College Literacy"

Each term since 1990 at least one section of an English writing course has been taught using the Daedalus courseware, an interactive writing program that allows all participants to read and comment upon the work of others. The InterChange is an option in Daedalus that allows for synchronous on-line discussions and is most frequently used in the courses. The instructional strategy involves student responses to reading assignments. During the lab sessions the instructor poses discussion questions using InterChange. The student responses, instructor comments, and student comments are on-line and available to all. Several variations on this type of exercise are employed as well as exercises that have asynchronous elements, e.g., read an article of interest from an assigned anthology, and write and post an essay about it that is available to the rest of the class. (Appendix A contains an abstract of an article by George Otte, the coordinator for this case study, on teaching writing with computers that includes an example of one of these InterChange exercises.)

[1] The descriptive sections for both CUNY and Baruch College have been adapted from their respective websites.

In spring term 1997, computer-enhanced instruction was used for the first time in a course titled "College Literacy" (ENG 0160). The course differs from standard basic (or remedial) writing in that students placing in it fail to demonstrate minimal proficiency in reading as well as in writing (as determined by standard tests used throughout the City University of New York). In other words, students in ENG 0160 are a special subset of students who place in remedial writing. Presumed to have more serious problems with literacy and language proficiency (because they fail the reading test as well as the writing test), they are taught in sections that are smaller than the standard basic writing sections and meet for one additional hour each week.

The course description below has been adapted from the college's website:[2]

> ENG 0160 (College Literacy) The fundamental premise of this course is that reading and writing should be addressed together. The course prepares students to pass the Writing Assessment Test; it also includes reading strategies and issues of reading comprehension. Students who place in ENG 0160 do so for a variety of reasons. Some have problems developing their thoughts and putting them on paper. Some find it difficult to organize their thoughts. Most make "too many errors of too many different kinds." Because students placed in ENG 0160 need extra help, not extra pressure, the course is non-credit: according to CUNY rules, a credit-bearing course must result in a traditional (A through F) grade, one that affects the student's grade point average. A non-credit course can result in what is called a non-punitive grade of P (for Pass) or R (for Repeat) that does not affect the GPA. Many students make the mistake of assuming a non-credit course is an unimportant course. Actually, these courses are so important, so fundamental, that the lack of credit should signal top priority: the general problem is inadequate pre-college preparation that must be addressed before the student has full experience of the general college curriculum.

The exit examination for ENG 0160 is the same as for all other basic writing courses: the CUNY Writing Assessment Test (WAT), a holistically graded writing sample scored by three individuals other than the instructor. The test is used for placement as well as for exit. Test scores, determined as the sum of scores given by individual readers, can range as high as 12. A score of 6 or below is a failing score, resulting in remedial placement—or, if the test is taken for exit, in a required re-taking of remediation. It takes an 8 to pass: since readers must agree on a pass/fail determination, an initial score of 7 must be resolved among the readers as either a 6 or an 8. All students who take ENG 0160 are placed in the course on the basis of a score of 6 (or a "high fail" score) combined with a failing score on the reading test.

[2] This is not the official course description but was designed as an informative elaboration of the official description for students.

Benefits of Daedalus

Student Learning Outcomes

As a course devised to help especially underprepared students, ENG 0160 has only existed for two years, but certain patterns have already developed. The relatively few students who place in ENG 0160 have consistently been accommodated by no more than half a dozen sections, with most students taking the course in the fall, about half as many taking it in the spring (when there are fewer entering students). A student cannot pass the course without passing the WAT. On average, only about a quarter of the students fail the test, but attrition is a significant problem: up to a third of the students do not so much fail the course as fail to complete it.

Three sections of ENG 0160 were offered in spring term 1997, one of them in the evening. In order to incorporate effective controls, the computer-enhanced section was one of two sections which were originally enrolled as a single section, thus drawing on precisely the same pool of students.[3]

Aside from the computer-enhanced instruction in one of the two mid-morning sections, the only difference was that the two sections had different instructors (as they had to, since both sections were scheduled for the same time period). Both instructors, however, had equivalent (high) experience with and commitment to instruction of underprepared students.

The computer-enhanced instruction in the one section had essentially two features. Computer text analysis was used to tabulate student errors in order to identify types of errors and their frequency. (The instructor first coded the errors, then ran this analysis and reviewed the results with the students in order to determine successful editing strategies appropriate to the writing of each individual student.) The more prominent feature, particularly in terms of class time, was the weekly experience of on-line, real-time discussions in the Daedalus subprogram InterChange. Since InterChange identifies students by their log-on names each time a message is sent, and since success in these discussions requires frequent and cogent posts, the program facilitated fluency while also cultivating a kind of pride of ownership: students wanted their posts, bearing their names, to be as impressive and relatively error-free as possible, while their experience as readers (as well as contributors) helped to develop a sense of audience, a sense of responses earned by different kinds of claims, premises, even errors.

A survey of the students revealed that they unanimously approved of both the error analyses and the synchronous discussions, while a third wished the discussions could be held more often than once a week (the class met just twice weekly) and a quarter wanted more error analyses (there were four throughout the term—one on the WAT they took as a placement test, three of WAT-like writing exercises).

But the chief determinant of the efficacy of computer-enhanced instruction in this instance has to be actual learning outcomes. Table 1 below shows that the computer-enhanced instruction did not have a significant effect on improving retention but did lead to higher pass rates: *all* the students who remained in this section passed the WAT.[4] Because the control group, to be a true

[3] Enrollment patterns at Baruch show that demographics can vary given certain time slots—that, for instance, students taking evening classes are rather older on average than students taking day classes, that those taking afternoon classes, are less likely to have jobs than those who take morning classes, etc.

[4] What the table does not show is that four students, a third of those who passed, passed at the level above the one signifying minimal competency—a level not reached by any student passing in the other two sections.

control, was taught by an instructor distinguished by commitment and conscientiousness, the pass rate for that group is higher than the historic pass rate (effectively represented by the fall 1996 enrollments for ENG 0160—a pass rate that is within 5 percentage points of the pass rates observed for this course during the past four terms of its existence).

Table 1—Student Performance in ENG 0160, "College Literacy" (Remedial Reading and Writing) 1996-97

ENG 0160	Enrollment	Passed *WAT*		Failed *WAT*		*Did not complete course**	
		no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Fall 1996 *(all sections)*	93	43	46	22	24	28	30
Spring 1997 *(all sections)*	49	26	53	12	24	11	23
Computer	16	12	75	0	0	4	25
Control	15	8	53	3	20	4	27
Evening	18	6	33	9	50	3	17

** This category includes withdrawals, incompletes, and students subject to dismissal.*

The pass rate for this term was 53 percent overall (or 7 percentage points higher than the previous term), but it would have been 42 percent, or 4 points lower, without the computer-enhanced section.

Assuming the students in the computer and control sections were equivalent (they all shared the characteristic of having failed both the writing and the reading comprehension placement exams) and had been chosen randomly when the original section was split, and that the two instructors were equally competent, dedicated, and motivating, one might attribute a 22 percentage point improvement in the course pass rate (from 53 percent to 75 percent) to the different teaching strategy based upon the Daedalus courseware as described above.

Within the confines of this small sample, however, one must be very cautious about attributing any general improvements in course completion rates to the courseware. The observed difference between the passing rates for the two courses is not statistically significant at either the one or five percent level.[5] The difference in the pass rates is in the right direction but it is only suggestive. The subjective case in favor of the courseware is further strengthened by the instructor's comments on the exit exams and by the prior experience of the instructor with the courseware as described in the appendix.

[5] To satisfy requirements of a chi-square test on these data, a dichotomous variable was created (passed and failed/withdrew) to compare outcomes of students in the computer and control sections. The test indicates that there is a 27 percent chance that outcomes in this sample of 31 students do not reflect real differences in the population of all students from which the sample was drawn.

Postscript - George Otte's comments on the exit exams in ENG 0160[6]

The instructor of the computer-enhanced section had an opportunity to review the students' exams, realizing that a single numerical score has to be fairly reductive as an evaluative indicator. That score is a holistic evaluation of the following criteria: organization and logic; detail and development; language, style, and tone; syntax; grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Though a significant decrease in error frequency was undoubtedly crucial to the students' success (and may, at least in part, be attributed to the computer-tabulated error analyses), the single most striking difference had to do with development. Every single student had a longer, more developed essay than the one written for placement; this may not seem striking until one realizes that a standard strategy on the WAT-as-exit is to write a short, carefully edited essay and thus "play it safe." The students in the computer-enhanced section consistently wrote longer essays that, in most cases, filled the entire text booklets (often running onto the back covers)—essays rich in ideas and details, organizationally complex, remarkable for their fluency. Because these are extemporaneous essays, written within strict 50-minute time constraints, the instructor believes the experience of synchronous computer-mediated conversation (again, on Daedalus's InterChange) was decisive in helping students to develop the facility to succeed on this off-the-top-of-the-head, under-the-gun writing test.

Student Persistence

Improved access is often mentioned as a benefit of the use of various forms of mediated instructional technology. In this particular case the use of computer courseware in a regularly scheduled on-campus course does not appear to improve a student's access to the institution. To the extent the technology contributes toward improving a student's English writing (and reading) skills above some minimal level, however, the chances that the student will re-enroll in later terms and successfully complete a degree program are improved, student persistence would be improved. If such an improvement could be documented, it would reasonably be counted as a benefit of the mediated instruction.

Table 2—Events that Would Be Observed If a Particular Form of Mediated Instruction Improved Student Persistence (Hypothetical Example)

Step	Event
(1)	Students pass the WAT at a differential rate. (E.g., the computer group—the Daedalus cohort—passes at 75 percent vs. 50 percent for the control cohort, see Table 1 above.)
(2)	Daedalus cohort enrolls for courses in the following term at a higher rate than the control cohort. (Similar behavior is observed in subsequent terms.)
(3)	A larger proportion of the Daedalus cohort completes other milestones such as acceptance into a degree major and attainment of upper division status.
(4)	Ten terms later (for example) a larger proportion of the Daedalus cohort has earned a degree than the control cohort.

[6] Appendix A contains an abstract of an article by George Otte describing and illustrating his experience with the use of Daedalus in another remedial English course similar but not identical to ENG 0160.

Although data are not currently available to test the improved persistence hypothesis for this particular case, Table 2 is provided to indicate the series of events that would be observed if, in fact, the hypothesis were true. The data to test Step 2 in the table could be relatively detailed and include measures of individual student performance in courses taken in later terms. Alternatively, persistence could be defined more simply as "enrolled for one or more courses in the following term." This latter definition implicitly assumes that adequate performance in courses is one of the major determinants of persistence. It also has the advantage of requiring substantially less data to implement.

Institutional Renewal

At this point only a few professors in the English department continue to use Daedalus to teach the remedial courses. This situation arises because part-time faculty teach most of the remedial courses and because there is little incentive to make the investment of time and energy initially required to implement the courseware.

The assessment is that courseware such as Daedalus represents the beginning of a transition (synchronous computer use in a classroom) that will not be complete until various forms of courseware are available on the Internet that can be accessed by students, at any time and from sites both on- and off-campus. The CUNY system is involved with developing some of these web-based courses and is currently sponsoring a series of faculty workshops on computer mediated communications and technology applications to instruction.

Cost Estimates

The cost components of this case are relatively straightforward. The class size is the same for both the Daedalus and the regular versions of the course. The direct costs of the instructor and the physical classroom are the same, or can be treated as equal from a policy perspective. The Daedalus courseware and the computer lab represent the main additional cost elements related to offering the Daedalus version of the course.

1. The current cost of a site license for the Daedalus courseware is $99 per student station. Assuming a three-year useful life for the courseware and that ENG 0160 represents approximately one-third of the entire usage made of the courseware results in a per station cost of $11 per year or $5.50 per term (even this overstates the cost of the license to the extent software upgrades are provided for less than the original license fee).
2. The costs of the computer equipment are based upon a price of $2,000 per station, a useful life of four years (eight terms) and a lab scheduled 45 hours per week of which 0.0889 (= 4/45) is allocated to ENG 0160. This results in an allocated per station cost of $22.
3. Equipment and software maintenance add approximately 20 percent to these amounts, i.e., $6 per station.

Based upon these assumptions, the total imputed costs of the courseware and a computer are about $34 per workstation. The total imputed cost for the computer section with 16 students enrolled is $544. Because the computer section is taught with essentially the same enrollment as the control section, the computer costs add to the total cost of offering the computer section, i.e., it is $544 more expensive than the regular classroom section.

The costs of a classroom section and a computer section of ENG 0160 are compared in Table 3. For purposes of the comparison, it is assumed that the observed differential pass rates apply, i.e., that the results observed in the small sample apply to the larger population (the reader is reminded that the observed differences in the pass rates were not statistically significant).

Table 3 illustrates what might be considered an obvious result—a higher rate of expenditure leads to a more desirable outcome. In Case 1 an expenditure of $500 per student results in a 50 percent pass rate while in Case 2, a $534 expenditure per student results in a 75 percent pass rate. Two types of cost reductions can be illustrated for the computer section, however. First, on a "cost per passing student" basis, the costs of the computer section are about 29 percent less than the regular classroom section. Second, if all students who do not pass the course the first time re-enroll for the course in a later term, the campus incurs additional "second round" costs. When these second round costs are included, the total costs associated with the original control section are $12,000, those for the computer section are $10,680. For this particular example, the "cost avoidance"[7] associated with the higher passing rate is $1,320 (about 11 percent).

Table 3 also illustrates a possible disincentive to the adoption of mediated technology (that improves pass rates) for institutions that fund departments on a per FTE basis. Since the improvement in the course pass rate reduces repeat enrollments, all other things equal, adoption of the computer technology would reduce departmental funding due to the reduction in future enrollments (arising from course repeaters). In spite of this reservation, and assuming the courseware can improve pass rates generally, cost avoidance of the type illustrated should still be considered an important benefit.

[7] The term "cost avoidance" is used here to emphasize that the savings is an amount that occurs at some future point; it is not a cash flow item that could be used to pay the expenses of the computer lab and software.

Table 3 The Effects of Differential Pass Rates and Different Course Section Costs

	Case 1 50% pass (control section) 16 enroll/8 pass	Case 2 75% pass (computer section) 16 enroll/12 pass
Cost position cost per course section	$8,000	$8,000
Courseware and computer costs	—	$544
Total estimated costs	$8,000	$8,544
Cost per student	$500	$534
Cost per passing student	$1,000	$712
"2nd round" (If all who don't pass repeat the course at least once)		
Additional enrollments in later terms	8	4
Cost of additional enrollments	$4,000 (@ $500/student)	$2,136 (@ $534/student)
Cost including "2nd round"	$12,000	$10,680
"Cost avoidance"		$1,320

Appendix A

Abstract for a proposed inclusion in an anthology on teaching writing with computers

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The following material addresses George Otte's experiences with the use of the Daedalus courseware in ENG 0150, a course similar but not identical to ENG 0160.

Right off, I should say I want to resist prizing product over process, the authorship of the individual as opposed to the participation of the collectivity. I am not interested in pumping life into process clichés—I'm convinced that when John Trimbur et al. speak of ours as a "post-process" moment they are profoundly right in many respects (particularly their sense that a "social turn" has been taken), but I'm also not interested in making sweeping claims for computer use; focusing on issues of context and process helps situate and delimit the claims I wish to advance.

These begin with the claim that students do not "get" or "have" ideas so much as make or shape them—that this, in fact, is what is at the heart of what the "compose" in "composition" means. To be sure, much (nearly all) they have to work with is already out there, circulating in the general currency of ideas, but each articulation is distinctive—not as something wholly original (far from it) but as a unique concatenation of thought and expression and all that is giving rise to that. Institutionalized education effectively obscures both the shaping role of the student and the social nature of what is being shaped. In the students' experience, school is all about what to think (and maybe just remember), not about how to think. And though this "how"—this process of shaping ideas—is eminently social (even and especially as received wisdom), individual assessments of work performed in isolation effect a dis-connection, a dis-integration, a de-composition of what it means to articulate ideas. (If you want a theory base for this, you could think of it as Seymour Papert/Amy Bruckman refracted through Mikhail Bakhtin.)

A reintegration into collectively effected discourse, a chance to rejoin and respond is precisely what synchronous composition (I'm speaking specifically of Daedalus's InterChange) makes possible by making it visible. While the writing classroom militates against genuine communication (making instead the exchange of papers a kind of labor exchange, in which grades are dispensed as pay or punishment for work done), synchronous conversation is an in-your-face experience of genuine communication and verbal interaction that brings to the fore rhetorical sophistication that's there, that need not be taught so much as tapped into.

The proof of the pudding is a radical hard case, even as hard cases go: a class of chronic failures, "multiple repeaters" who could not pass a standard exit exam and thus emerge successfully from basic writing. All these students had repeatedly failed the CUNY Writing Assessment Test—the most widely used of the sort of test the profession calls the 50-minute

impromptu. I don't want to get into the vices and virtues of such an exam (though it's more likely to be vicious than virtuous as an exit exam), but I do need to note that student response is *not* composed on the computer and that it is *not* scored by the instructor (but by scorers who do not know the students). Consequently, when 17 out of 18 of these students who had repeatedly failed this exam passed it (there's a wonderful "Stand and Deliver" kind of story behind this), the results amounted to quasi-objective proof (or at least compelling evidence) of something people in the field are profoundly curious and skeptical about: whether the experience of computer-mediated communication translates at all into effects on "ordinary" writing.

The class read Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* together, and discussions of it on InterChange were tough problem-solving activities, challenges to wrestle with questions even Kozol couldn't answer. Students were asked to air their thoughts and work with the thoughts of others—to see what's out there as grounds for discussion in terms of attitudes, premises, different value-based and experiential takes.

Students who had been taught—drilled—to organize papers in formulaic fashion began to see development not as a ticking off of reasons but a testing of perspectives. Messages appeared under their log-on names, investing them with an important sense of ownership, while competition to get one's thoughts out there increased fluency, and reading what others said included the instructive "experience" of error (as opposed to its dissective disclosure by the instructor).

All these things gradually helped transform the students' writing. While no one concluding essay would blind a reader with its brilliance, they were all (save one) certified as competent, and what might be more illuminating than any one paper is the group thinking/writing that got them to that pass.

The example I've chosen is atypical only in being so short. (Usually InterChange session transcripts run twice as long, but this was a quick one, weighing in at only about 1,000 words. As was often the case, I gave students a choice of conferences, and over half the class participated in this one, which occurred a little over halfway through the term.) What I would propose to do is analyze how and why the following writing experience fostered what it was the students needed to get them past the exit exam and out of basic writing—not least of all by helping them see how profoundly ambivalent they were on a pivotal issue, both individually and collectively.

Start of conference InterChange

...Students were asked to air their thoughts and work with the thoughts of others—to see what's out there as grounds for discussion in terms of attitudes, premises, different value-based and experiential takes....

Message No. 1—George Otte

In Chapter 6, Kozol tells the story of someone who sued the state of Texas over unequal funding—and won. But that's not the whole story. "In San Antonio, where Demetrio Rodriguez brought his suit against the state in 1968, the children of the poor still go to separate and unequal schools." If the court system takes so long (the verdict in the '68 suit was handed down in '89) and doesn't have much effect even then (Kozol notes "a series of delays and challenges and, doubtless, further litigation"), what are we to conclude? Is there no real hope for change? Must change come about by other means? If we shouldn't accept "savage inequalities" in education, what should we do?

Message No. 2—Paula Ruiz[8]

Changes take time specially those changes that will favor the poor and black people. I believe there is hope in many people that changes to these situations can occur. The problem is that there are also people (those people who have the money and the power) who have hopes that these changes will not favor the poor and black people.

Message No. 3—Rhadames Delacruz

To achieve change in the educational system we must unite as a society and take a stand. We control the polititions we control there political future. They work for us. Most of Americans don't vote. We are letting a small persent of people make all the decisions for us. If we want to stop the inequalities we must let the polititions know and then use the vote. If they don't want to work for us we kick them out and put some one who will.

Message No. 4—Paula Ruiz

I don't really see what other means we can use to change the situations that poor and black kids have at their school. I think that the situations that Kozol wrote about in his book are very strong to let these people (government people and rich people) know and understand that we need changes fast. They don't care and I believe they will never care no matter what.

Message No. 5—Yanjun Zhou

Changes will occur sooner or later, but it will take a lot of people's williness to do something about it. People must fight the battles to win the war on equality. Every case like the Demetrio Rodriguez, people win something; moreover, other case can come out and look to the case as a battle won. We can look at the case with hope; eventhough, it took so longer we can at least said more and more people will fight for their educational equality.

Message No. 6—Ana Estrella

Paula this is absolutly true. I agree with your first message.

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[8] The student names do not necessarily represent individuals enrolled in the course. The names do, however, reflect the ethnic diversity of the students enrolled.

Message No. 7—Rosa Chabla

When we want something changed let us say a law something tragic must happen in order for a change to take place. I conclude that if we want change in the education system something tragic must also take place. The problem is that the people in charge of the states do not want changes because they are scared of it. Until these people realize that we will all be affected by savage inequalities there will be no changes.

Message No. 8—Hanh Van

Believe it or not, this country have change a lot. It have change from black and poor not getting an education at all to given the chance to an education. This change took along time to accomplish, but we did change it and that is the main idea. Everything take time, if we stick it out and keep on demanding changes we will get it, but we must be patience.

Message No. 9—Ana Estrella

The poor people will never get the same rights that rich get because of the position of the poor. The rich are always the first one in everything held for the public and what is left is what the poor get.

Message No. 10—Taisha Knowles

There is hope for a change in this unequal opportunity for school. The people who have the authority to give better schooling is holding it back from the people of color and other minority groups. The only thing we can do is come together an fight for what we know belongs to our people.

Message No. 11—Ana Estrella

All this people living on those conditions hope for change but they know that it will take too long to occur. The only solution that I can think of is to discriminate the rich if they discriminate the poor. Give the same kind of education to everyone.

Message No. 12—George Otte

A lot of the discussion I see so far is really, at bottom, about who controls this country—and so Rhadames talks about the importance of voting, Yanjun talks about the importance of little victories, and Hanh speaks of gradual progress. Can you say more about WHY you believe change for the better will or will not occur?

Message No. 13—Avamaria Paponette

Paula: I agree government and rich people will never care no matter what. If they did care they would have done something a long time ago.

Message No. 14—Oy Ng

There is a saying "Good things comes to those who wait", I think changes are possible, but it will take time. As Hanh said it took a long time before blacks and the poor were allowed to attend schools. As for now we must accept it, but this doesn't mean we have to like it.

Message No. 15—Esmeira Molano

It is going to be difficult to hope for changes, especially for the minority since they have little to hope for. However, hope can occur at any time. I believe it will.

Message No. 16—Flor Barrientos

Is true this is going to stay the same. We just have to deal with our lives and do our best. For some people this is a problem, but not for everyone. There are a lot of minorities with their careers and that have achieve what they wanted, so now they have to wait for their children to follow their steps.

Message No. 17—Indira Mercedes

I think that change will be made with time. However, the "haves" and the "have nots" will always be there. Since the rich will never give the poor the opportunity to become as rich as them.

Message No. 18—George Otte

I see a fair amount of hope and a fair amount of despair, but it's all pretty general. I want each one of you to take a specific instance—not from Kozol's book but from your life—and explain how it supports your belief that things will or won't change. Don't do this here in InterChange but switch the computers off for a while and avail yourself of good old fashioned pen and paper.

End of conference InterChange